April the British Government joined in the Geneva censure of the treaty-breaker, and that in June it signed a pact condoning a formidable breach. It was in vain that the First Lord of the Admiralty pointed out that we had merely tried to circumscribe the effects of a unilateral decision which we had not been able to prevent. To accept German rearmament as inevitable was one thing, to recognize it in a treaty was another. Still more alarming in French and Italian eyes was our apparent readiness to take independent action in a matter of first-class importance, as if the Stresa pact or the Anglo-French programme of February 3 did not exist. Germany's potential naval strength, which appeared so modest to the British Government, assumed a different aspect when viewed from a Continental angle. Anglo-French relations were of too long standing to suffer permanent injury ; but the pact was a shock, and such Anglophobe circles as survived in France were stirred to fresh activity. The agreement, in a word, was probably the right thing done in the wrong way. A second and mortal blow at the Stresa front from another quarter was soon to follow.

XIV. THE ABYSSINIAN WAR

The Versailles era ended in 1935, when Hitler struck off Germany's military fetters and Mussolini attacked Abyssinia. Henceforth the main problem confronting British statesmanship was that of how to deal with German and Italian ambitions. Broadly speaking, Europe had been controlled since 1918 by the victorious allies, Engknd, France and Italy. Germany was too weak to pky an active part, and Russia turned her back on the European game. Such a static simplification could not be expected to last. France had recovered in twenty years from the disasters of

1871, and Germany might well be on her legs again in a shorter time. Russia was certain to resume her place as a Great Power before long. Italy's dissatisfaction with her share of the earth's surface was notorious, and at any moment she might join in the clamour for territorial revision. Her population was increasing Ind emigration to America was rigidly limited. " Fascist Italy must expand or suffocate," remarked the Duce to an American journalist in 1926. Though he disclaimed war-like intentions, he was bursting with personal as well as national ambition. The barometer pointed to stormy weather.

After assuring himself during Laval's visit to Rome in